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LANGUAGE AND "NATIONALISM" IN SOUTH AFRICA.

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PUB DATE NOV 66

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.09 HC-$0.64 16P.

DESCRIPTORS- *LANGUAGES, *SOCIOLINGUISTICS, *NATIONALISM, *AFRICAN LANGUAGES, OFFICIAL LANGUAGES, SECOND LANGUAGES, LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION, AFRIKAANS, XHOSA, SOTHO, ZULU, ENGLISH, SOUTH AFRICA

THE ONLY GROUP IN SOUTH AFRICA TO HAVE DEVELOPED A NATIONALISM BASED, AT LEAST PARTLY, ON ETHNICITY AND LANGUAGE ARE THE AFRIKANERS. DUE TO AFRIKANER FEELINGS OF NATIONALISM, ATTEMPTS HAVE BEEN MADE TO SEGREGATE AFRICANS AND NON-AFRICANS OF DIFFERENT LANGUAGE GROUPS FROM THE AFRIKANERS AND FROM EACH OTHER. MOTHER-TONGUE INSTRUCTION IS STRESSED AT ALL LEVELS OF SCHOOLING DESPITE THE PREFERENCE OF AFRICANS TO BE TAUGHT IN ENGLISH. ASSUMING A MAJORITY GOVERNMENT IN THE FUTURE, THE PRESENT SITUATION, WHEREIN OFFICIAL STATUS IS GRANTED ONLY TO THE TWO MAIN LANGUAGES, ENGLISH AND AFRIKAANS, IS UNLIKELY TO BE ACCEPTABLE TO MOST SOUTH AFRICANS, AND MOST EDUCATED AFRICANS WOULD PROBABLY BE RELUCTANT TO SUBSTITUTE A BANTU LANGUAGE AS THE OFFICIAL TONGUE. GRANTING EQUAL STATUS TO ALL FIVE MAJOR LANGUAGES WOULD BE COSTLY AND ADMINISTRATIVELY INEFFICIENT. ONE WORKABLE SOLUTION SEEMS TO BE TO RECOGNIZE ENGLISH AS THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE, WHILE USING THE OTHER FOUR MAIN LANGUAGES (AFRIKAANS, XHOSA, SOTHO, AND ZULU) AS OFFICIAL REGIONAL SECOND LANGUAGES. (NC)

ED011661

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LANGUAGE AND "NATIONALISM" IN SOUTH AFRICA

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To state that language and nationalism are closely related is a tautology, but one that needs restating in view of the loose usage of the term "nationalism" in the Third World and particularly in the African literature. In the 19th century European sense of the word,"nationalism" referred to a political movement or a process of growing self-consciousness based on a feeling of common ethnicity. Of the several criteria of ethnicity, a common language has often been the paramount one, with religion coming in second place. Thus, when one speaks of German or Italian nationalism, one means primarily the growth of political consciousness by people sharing the same language.

In dealing with contemporary Africa, social scientists have greatly confused political analysis by using "nationalism" to mean broadly "anti-colonialism."[1] If the confusion had stopped there, not too much damage would have been made, but, faced with the problem of having to use a descriptive term to refer to true nationalism in Africa, the word "tribalism" was resorted to. Apart from the invidious connotations of "tribalism," the word "tribe" and its derivatives have been used in at least half a dozen unrelated senses. A "tribe" has meant a group speaking the same language, a group inhabiting a certain area, or a traditional state, even though the three criteria often did not coincide. "Tribalism" has meant federalism as opposed to centralism, nationalism as opposed to internationalism, traditionalism as distinguished from modernism, or a rural orientation as opposed to an urban one.

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In conclusion, I would suggest that "tribe" and its derivatives be scrapped altogether. To refer to a political movement based on ethnicity, I shall use the term "nationalism" (e.g. "Yoruba nationalism," "Ewe nationalism," "Kikuyu nationalism"). To refer to political movements that use the multi-national state as their defining unit, I shall speak of "territorialism" (e.g. "Nigerian territorialism," "Congolese territorialism"). Only in the few cases of true African nation-states, i.e. in the few instances of culturally homogeneous or nearly homogeneous states, can the term "nationalism" properly be applied at the level of the sovereign polity (e.g. Somali nationalism, Egyptian nationalism or Rwanda nationalism). Finally, where the defining unit is larger than both the sovereign state and the ethnic group, I shall speak of "internationalism" (e.g. European internationalism, African internationalism, Pan-Islamic internationalism). However, movements aimed at uniting in a single state ethnic groups divided between several polities are properly "nationalist" (e.g. Bakongo nationalism, German nationalism prior to Bismarck).

Having hopefully given back to the term nationalism the reasonably clear meaning it had until my Africanist colleagues confused the issue, I shall turn to an analysis of the political role of language in the Republic of South Africa.[2] According to the above definitions, there is no political movement in contemporary South Africa which can properly be called "nationalist," although I confess to having loosely used the term in my previous writings about South Africa.

Whatever nationalism existed among the African nation-states of the 19th century (the Zulu, the Xhosa, the Sotho, the Swazi, the Ndebele) has all but disappeared by now. Although the indigenous languages are spoken by more people than ever before, and although feelings of ethnic particularism and prejudice persist between African ethnic groups, these feelings have little if any political meaning in the modern context. (They are analogous to ethnic feelings of people of Italian, Irish or Jewish descent in the United States for example.) What is often called "African

nationalism" or "black nationalism" in South Africa is the movement aiming at the overthrow of white supremacy, and represented by such organizations as the Pan African Congress and/the African National Congress. In our terminology, this is an instance of territorialism. Similarly, "white nationalism" is simply a racist ideology for the maintenance of the status quo.

Of course, some scholars would argue that "Afrikaner nationalism," i.e. the political movement of people of Dutch or Boer descent, is an authentic case of nationalism as I have defined it.[3] Afrikaner nationalism does indeed have many characteristics of classical nationalism, and, of all political movements in South Africa, comes closest to being truly nationalist. Yet, the added element of racism complicates the picture. Speaking Afrikaans as one's mother tongue is a necessary condition for membership in the Volk. But it is not a sufficient condition; one must also meet the test of racial "purity." For every six "white" people who are ethnically Afrikaners, there are five "Coloured" Afrikaners who are denied membership into the Volk. That race is an even more important criterion than ethnicity is shown by the fact that, de jure, a non-Afrikaans-speaking white may belong to the governing Nationalist Party (and de facto quite a number of German-and a few English-speaking whites do belong to the Party), whereas an Afrikaans-speaking Coloured may not. While there is a strong ethnic component to "Afrikaner nationalism" (probably over 95 percent of the Nationalist Party members are Afrikaans-speaking), that movement is first and foremost racial and only secondarily nationalist. Yet, the Afrikaners, of any ethnic group in South Africa, have come closest to developing a nationalist movement.

Although no South African political movement is, strictly speaking, nationalist, ethnicity has been, next to race, the most important line of cleavage in South African society. More specifically, the English-Afrikaner conflict which goes back to the first years of the nineteenth century has an important linguistic dimension, and the

official status and use of the two main European languages has long been a football of white politics.

Here I should like to deal briefly with four main aspects of the political significance of language in contemporary South Africa:

1) traditional Afrikaner "nationalism";

2) the reaction of other ethnic and racial groups to Afrikaner nationalism;

3) the use of ethnic revivalism and the attempt to revive African linguistic nationalism in the apartheid program of the government;

4) problems presented by multi-lingualism in the future development of South Africa as a unitary state under majority control.

1) The division of the dominant white group into English and Afrikaners is based mainly on ethnicity as symbolized mostly by language.[4] The long-standing conflict between these two ethnic groups goes back to the early 19th century, and has a long and complex history, involving many interrelated aspects. With the advent of British hegemony at the Cape in the first years of the 19th century, the Afrikaners found themselves in a politically, economically, socially and culturally subordinate position vis à vis the English, although they remained dominant in relation to the non-white population. In this respect, their position became analogous to that of French Canadians after the British conquest, and language became much the same kind of rallying point for the development of a politico-cultural nationalism. Due to the presence of a large non-white majority, however, policy toward Africans, Coloureds and Indians became a major dimension of English-Afrikaner conflicts in a somewhat analogous way to the North-South conflict over the extension of slavery in the 19th century United States. Thus, Afrikaner nationalism acquired a strong racial as well as ethnic component.

The feeling of ethnic and racial identity of the Afrikaners led to a growing "nationalism" which had the following characteristics:

a) An origin myth with an idealized, quasi-sacred, heroic and epic version of Afrikaner history. The Boer fights against British imperialism and the African nations, the frontier, the Great Trek, the two Anglo-Boer Wars and other events are glorified and legitimized in Biblical terms. The themes of the Chosen People, the flight from Egypt, the Promised Land, and divine guidance appear frequently in Afrikaner-Calvinist historiography. This herioc conception of the Volk's history has its great temple (the Voortrekkers Monument near Pretoria), its demi-god (Paul Kruger), its atrocity stories (the British concentration camps), its martyrs (Piet Retief), its traitors (Jan Smuts), and its holidays (Day of the Covenant).

b) An ideology which is a complex blend of rugged individualism, egalitarianism among the Chosen People, anti-capitalist agrarianism, fundamentalistic Calvinism, anti-cosmopolitan isolationism, white supremacy and racism, xenophobia, fear of miscegenation and cultural assimilation, anti-Communism, ascriptive exclusivism and narrow provincialism and ethnocentrism.

c) A distinctive culture symbolized by Voortrekker costumes, diet, the Dutch Reformed Churches, and, above all, by the Afrikaans language.[5] Concern for the maintenance of this distinctive culture and for resisting anglicization has centered around the recognition of Afrikaans as a national language of equal status to English, the actual use of Afrikaans in government, and the use of that language as a medium of instruction in the racially and ethnically segregated schools. Feelings toward Afrikaner culture have often consisted of an ambivalent mixture of pride and shame vis à vis the more cosmopolitan and dynamic English culture.

d) A number of political or quasi-political organizations, the major ones being the old and the "purified" Nationalist Party, and the latter's elite secret society, the Broederbond. In addition, quasi-Fascist organizations like the New Order and the Ossewa Brandwag, and splinter parties like the Afrikaner Party rose and fell in the 1930's and 1940's. Today, the Nationalist Party has effectively

rallied the great majority of the Afrikaners, and has ruled the country since 1948. All these political organizations have shared the aims of emancipation from Britain as a foreign power, of ethnic paramountcy over English South Africans, and of racial supremacy over all non-whites, including those who are ethnically Afrikaners.

Except for the added element of racism, which is, of course, quite salient and gives Afrikaner nationalism a special character, that movement has all the main hallmarks of "classical" nationalism as defined earlier. Insofar as this is true, Afrikaner nationalism is distinctly unlike most political movements of independence and anti-colonialism in black Africa, and is especially different from the so-called African nationalism within South Africa itself.

2) It might be expected that militant Afrikaner nationalism would have elicited other similar movements among the other main ethnic and racial groups in South Africa. In fact, for diverse reasons, this has not been the case to any significant extent.

Of the three main non-white racial groups, the Coloureds have been most completely westernized, and have most aspired to social assimilation into the dominant white group. Although long frustrated in their assimilationist aspirations, most Coloureds, far from wanting to maintain a separate identity, continue to seek acceptance into the two main white ethnic groups whose culture they share.

Indians have been divided into two main religious groups, five language groups, and many more caste groups, any of which would be far too small to constitute a basis for a politically successful nationalist movement. Furthermore, South African Indians have been rapidly anglicized, and although they do not, by and large, seek assimilation to the whites, they do seek equal, non-discriminatory acceptance into a multi-racial and multi-ethnic South Africa. Since the days of Mahatma Gandhi, South African Indian politics have been secular, universalistic, and opposed to any ethnic or racial divisions.

English-speaking whites did develop a slight degree of nationalist feelings in response to Afrikaner nationalism. Some cultural and political organizations (including small splinter parties) did form along English ethnic lines, and, in the Province of Natal, there is a modicum of English nationalist sentiment. However, English nationalism remained a very subdued phenomenon compared to Afrikaner nationalism. There are two major reasons for this state of affairs. First, being a minority within a minority, English South Africans could only achieve power by allying themselves with non-nationalist Afrikaners, i.e. by taking a racist but anti-nationalist stand in politics. The major parties in which the English have gained a share of political power (such as the South African Party and the United Party) have consistently based their appeal on all whites irrespective of ethnicity.

Secondly, English South Africans have not developed a distinctive culture to the same extent as the Afrikaners, and, consequently, any attempt to stress English ethnicity has been stigmatized by Afrikaners as a disloyal attachment to a foreign colonial power. Local South African English has, of course, some dialectical idiosyncracies, but remains closer to standard British English than American English, and, hence, cannot qualify for separate language status as Afrikaans does in relation to Dutch. In addition, no single religion (comparable to the Dutch Reformed Churches for Afrikaners) unites English South Africans who are split between Anglicans, Methodists, Catholics and Jews, not to mention many smaller Protestant denominations.

Among the various African language groups, there still exists some degree of ethnic particularism, and the vast majority of black South Africans speak one of the Bantu tongues as their home language. Furthermore, three of these language groups are quite large, both absolutely (two to three millions each) and relatively (between 14 and 20 percent of the total population). Yet, what has been called "African nationalism" has, from its inception in the first years of the 20th century, shown few nationalist characteristics, and many hallmarks of "territorialism." The African

National Congress, the All-African Convention, the Pan-African Congress, and African trade unionism have all been militantly opposed to white supremacy, to racial segregation and discrimination, to ethnic particularism (which they have stigmatized as "tribalism"), and to any program of cultural distinctiveness or revivalism.

Generally, the ideology of the African political movements has stressed equality regardless of race or ethnicity, and, although tolerant of cultural pluralism, it has never based its appeal on ethnic distinctions. Faced with an acutely racist dominant group, African political movements have sometimes made a racially-based appeal to Africans or to all non-whites, but scarcely ever to specific cultural groups. European culture has rarely been disparaged (a fact which is hardly surprising since the vast majority of leaders are Western-educated, mostly in Christian mission schools), and any divisive feelings of ethnic separation between Africans have been regarded as a political liability. If anything, the black South African intelligentsia has shown a considerable drive toward westernization, and attitudes of "cultural shame" toward indigenous cultures. Unlike in other parts of Africa where "nationalist" movements have adopted some traditional symbols and have sought to africanize their ideology, the South African freedom movements have been unashamedly eclectic in ideology and organization (borrowing freely from America, Europe and Asia), and western, "modern" and anti-traditional in both their tactics and aims. They have challenged racism and white supremacy largely in terms of Christian ethics and a Western-inspired liberal or socialist philosophy of democracy, equality and freedom.

Thus, the only group in South Africa (and one of the few in the sub-Saharan part of the continent) to have developed a nationalism based, at least partly, on ethnicity and language are the Afrikaners. We shall now turn to the implications of that fact for apartheid policy toward the other ethnic groups in South Africa.

3) The attempt by the ruling Afrikaner nationalists to impose upon the other groups a policy of rigid racial and ethnic separation is the result of complex motivations. It is partly a systematic method of dividing Africans, some two-thirds of whom have now become "detribalized," into mutually antagonistic ethnic groups. To the extent that Africans of various language groups have intermixed, intermarried, learned each other's tongues, and lived and worked side by side in the cities under identical conditions of oppression and destitution, they have developed a common consciousness which transcends ethnicity. The government policy of "retribalization" is in part a conscious effort to counteract these universalistic trends, and to isolate each ethnic group in a cultural and political desert.

Beyond this rather obvious motive, Pretoria-sponsored cultural revivalism for Africans arises from a confusion between race and culture on the part of the ruling Afrikaners. In spite of considerable contrary evidence in their own country, most South African whites believe that culture is in part racially determined, and, hence, that a given culture reflects the innate abilities and propensities of its members. Consequently, the alledgedly "primitive" Bantu cultures are held to be peculiarly suited to the supposedly "primitive" mentality of Africans.

A third source of cultural revivalism arises from the projection of the Afrikaner's sense of ethnic particularism and linguistic chauvinism onto other people. Since the preservation of ethnic and racial identity has been a paramount value in Afrikaner nationalism, many Afrikaners have assumed that other ethnic groups would feel likewise.

Pretoria-sponsored revivalism vis à vis Africans is reflected in a number of apartheid programs. In urban areas, an attempt is made to segregate Africans of different language groups from each other, as well as Africans from non-Africans. In the rural areas, the Bantustan policy consists of consolidating and reconstructing mono-ethnic areas with a semi-autonomous political structure modeled in part on

traditional chieftainship. Such insignificant voting rights as Africans enjoy are based on ethnicity. E.g. in the Transkei, Xhosa-speaking people vote for Xhosa candidates to the Xhosa Assembly.

Similarly, the entire educational system for Africans has been "tribalized" by the Bantu Education Department. Mother-tongue instruction is stressed at all levels of schooling despite overwhelming opposition of Africans who would prefer to be taught in English, at least beyond the lower primary grades. Ethnically segregated pseudo-universities have been created for the Zulu, Xhosa and Sotho, and these "bush colleges" are practically the only places where Africans of a given language group can receive any form of post-secondary education. In these institutions, attempts are made to use Bantu languages as media of instruction, to modify the curriculum in line with Pretoria's conception of what is good for Africans, to create an artificial technical vocabulary in the Bantu languages, to incorporate Bantu elements into the architecture, and to instill ethnic chauvinism into the students.[6]

4) The significance of language in South African politics is of course not limited to the past and present. Assuming that the <u>status quo</u> is unlikely to continue for much longer, and that South Africa will continue to exist as a unitary state but under a government representing the majority of the people, the use of official languages will have immediate educational and political implications. Obviously, the present situation where only the two main European languages are granted official status is unlikely to be acceptable to most South Africans under a majority government. Many Africans have developed negative feelings toward Afrikaans as the language of the oppressors. But, as the home language of well over three million people, nearly half of whom are non-whites, Afrikaans can not easily be eliminated.

Most educated Africans, who are likely to play prominent roles in the future, would probably be reluctant to substitute a Bantu language as the official tongue.

To do so would revive ethnic rivalries and raise a host of other problems. No single language is spoken as a mother tongue by more than twenty percent of total population, and three Bantu languages are spoken by nearly equal numbers of people (i.e. between two and three millions). Some African languages (notably Zulu, Swazi and Xhosa) are closely enough related so that they could conceivably be fused into a single official written tongue; but, even so, the latter would only encompass some 40 percent of the total population.

Alternatively, to make English the only national language would also be unacceptable. Most African leaders recognize the importance and practical superiority of English as a medium of inter-ethnic communication, of trade, of intellectual life, and of contact with the rest of Africa and of the world. Yet, English comes only in fifth place (after Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu and Sotho) in terms of numbers of native speakers. Furthermore, English is also associated with a segment of the dominant racial minority.

Another possibility would be to grant equal status to all five major languages; but this would present great practical problems which, while not insuparable, would lead to high cost and inefficiency of administration. Alone the cost of translating and printing official documents in five tongues and of simultaneously translating legislative debates would be prohibitive for a none-too-affluent country. In terms of education, a five-language policy would mean one of two things. Either children of the five main groups would be taught in their mother tongue, or all five languages would have to be taught in all schools. The second possibility is clearly unworkable and the first one would meet with strong African opposition because it would perpetuate <u>de facto</u> racial segregation and unequal educational opportunities.

One workable solution seems to meet pragmatic exigencies as well as to resolve at least some of the major political problems raised by language in a reconstructed South Africa of the future. English should be recognized as the national language

to be taught in all schools, and used in the central legislature and in official documents. At the same time, the other four main languages should also have official recognition as regional second languages. Thus, in the Western Cape, Afrikaans would be the second language; in the Eastern Cape, Xhosa; in the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, Sotho ; and in Natal , Zulu. In any given area, two languages (one of them English) would be used in schools and in govermment offices. Signs, ordinances, forms and other written documents would be published in English and in the local second language.

Here is not the place to elaborate on this brief linguistic blueprint for a reconstructed South Africa. Two things, however, are certain, if one assumes that South Africa will continue to exist as a unitary multi-national state, but under majority government. First, the official use of one or more languages is going to create difficult ond unavoidable problems with both ethnic and racial mamifications. Second, any satisfactory solution of linguistic problems will have to take both "non-rational" and "rational" factors into account. The former include such things as the demographic, educational and other forces affecting the ethnic distribution of power, and the subjective attitudes and values of people concerning the various languages. The latter, which are likely to clash with political contingencies, involve considerations of administrative cost and efficiency of relative usefulness of tongues in various forms and fields of communication, and of the feasibility of guided linguistic change ranging from minor standardization of orthography to major fusion between existing tongues.

Clearly, South Africa offers fascinating prospects for both theoretical and applied sociolinguistics; and, equally clearly, sociolinguistics will have to assign to each set of factors its proper weight in the total equation. For such an embryonic discipline, the difficulty will be as great as the opportunity.

Footnotes

1. There is an abundant literature on African "nationalism." For political analys s using various definitions of nationalism, see Section VII of Pierre L. van den Berghe, ed., Africa, Social Problems of Change and Conflict, San Francisco, Chandler, 1965. This work also contains a bibliography. See also Immanuel Wallerstein, ed., Social Change, The Colonial Situation, New York, John Wiley, 1966.

2. The social science literature on South Africa is abundant. An extensive and recent bib iography can be found in my book South Africa, A Study in Conflict, Middletown, Conn., Wesleyan University Press, 1965. Among other germane books on the subject are Gwendolen M. Carter, The Politics of Inequality, New York, Praeger, 1958; C.W. de Kiewiet, A History of South Africa, Social and Economic, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1941; Muriel Horrell, A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, Johannesburg, South African Institute of Race Relations, annual; Leo Kuper, An African Bourgeoisie, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1965; Leo Marquard, The Peoples and Policies of South Africa, London, Oxford University Press, 1962; Sheila Patterson, Colour and Culture in South Africa, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953; Sheila Patterson, The Last Trek, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957; Michael Roberts and A.E.G. Trollip, The South African Opposition, 1939-1945, London, Longmans, 1947; and William Henry Vatcher, White Laager, The Rise of Afrikaner Nationalism, New York, Praeger, 1965.

3. In this connection Vatcher makes a twofold error when he states "Afrikaner nationalism is the classic form of all the nationalisms that now flourish on the continent of Africa." (Cf. William Henry Vatcher, op. cit., p. ix.) Afrikaner "nationalism" is unlike most other African "nationalisms" in that it does have both an ethnic and a racial basis.

4. The racial breakdown of the population is as follows: Whites or "Europeans," 19.4%; Africans 68.2%; Indians, 3.0%; and Coloureds, 9.4%. Of the whites, some 57% speak Afrikaans as their mother-tongue, 39% English, and 4% other tongues, mostly German and Dutch. The 1951 Census classified 73% of the whites as bilingual, but only 2% habitually speak both languages at home. Of the Coloureds, 89% speak Afrikaans as their home language, and the remainder English; 46.5% of the Coloureds are bilingual. The two largest language groups among Indians are Tamil and Hindi spoken by some 40% each; the remaining 20% speak Telugu, Urdu and Gugarati. In addition to those Indian languages, some 77% of the Indians know English and 16% Afrikaans. Among Africans, 29% speak Xhosa, 26% Zulu, 22% Sotho, 8% Tswana, 5% Tsonga, 3% Swazi, 3% Ndebele, 2% Venda, and 2% a sprinkling of otherBantu languages. In addition, 15% speak English and 21% Afrikaans.

5. Afrikaans, originally a dialect of Dutch with indigenous and Malay admixtures, gained the status of a distinct written language in the nineteenth century.

6. Leo Kuper has written a true to life satire of these bush colleges. Cf. The College Brew, Durban, privately printed, 1960.